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Sustainable Development and Quality of Urban Life

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Abstract

In this paper sustainability and quality of life concept have been evaluated based on quality of life (QoL) researches. With this purpose environmental, economic, social, physical and health related indicators were discussed to contribute to the sustainable development strategies.

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Keywords: Quality of urban life; sustainability; QoL indicators

1. Introduction and theoretical background

The United Nations definition of sustainable city is where achievements in social, economic, and physical development are made to last. A sustainable city maintains a lasting security from environmental hazards that have the potential to threaten development achievements (United Nations, 2001). Only a well organised national, regional and local framework enhances the ability to deliver services and resources. A well informed framework equipped with the data including quality of life assessment, is essential in enhancing the sustainability process. Additionally a thriving city needs to be a healthy environment for human interaction. The World Health Organisation report (1997) describe twenty steps for developing a Healthy Cities project outlines the necessary ingredients that make up a healthy living environment.

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1.1. *Qualities of a Healthy City*

A city should strive to provide:

A clean, safe physical environment of high quality
 An ecosystem that is stable now and sustainable in the long term;
 A strong, mutually supportive and non-exploitive community;
 A high degree of participation by the public over the decisions affecting their lives, health & wellbeing;
 The meeting of basic needs (for food, water, shelter, income, safety and work) for all the city's people;
 Access to a wide variety of experiences and resources, with the chance for a wide variety of contact, interactions and communication;
 A diverse, vital and innovative city economy;
 The encouragement of connectedness with the past, with the cultural and biological heritage
 A form that is compatible with and enhances the preceding characteristics;
 An optimum level of appropriate public health and care services accessible to all; and
 High high levels of positive health and low levels of disease

Source: The World Health Organisation Report (1997)

Sustainable communities are places where people want to live and work, now and in the future. They meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, are sensitive to their environment, and contribute to a high quality of life. Exploring community and neighbourhood profiles through quality of life research can enhance decision making processes in relation to community and sustainability.

Quality of life (QoL) is a concept that has inspired much research in the past decades and has established a strong position in local, national and European Union agendas (SELMA 2004). The concept has also had a strong influence on social and political trends being applied to a number of fields, such as urban and regional planning, health promotion, disability, social indicators research and economic and mental health research.

The implementation of a credible system of quality of life monitoring equates to a greater understanding of both social and economic trends. This empowers decision makers with the knowledge base required to assess liveability, environmental quality, quality of life, and sustainability in order to develop national, regional, and local resources. Quality of life research can provide the foundations of creating, maintaining, and positively promoting sustainability through implementation of evidence based policy.

The United Nations Agenda 21 Report (1993) states that there is a need to strengthen the scientific basis for sustainable management, and countries need to develop, apply and institute the necessary tools for sustainable development with reference to 'Quality-of-life indicators covering, for example, health, education, social welfare, state of the environment, and the economy' (UN 1993).

Issues relating to quality of life are now high on the political agenda due to an acknowledgement that levels of life quality effects both economic and social wellbeing. That is, issues effecting people's lives are more than purely economically driven and that people in developed countries have begun to realise that quality of life is not necessarily a simple function of material wealth (Pacione, 1993).

Objective measures, or social indicators, represent in a broad sense the individual's standard of living comprising of verifiable conditions inherent in the given cultural unit (Dissart. & Deller, 2000) and are especially useful at the neighbourhood, city, and country levels (Marans, 2003). Subjective quality of life explores the degree to which the individual's life is perceived to match some implicit or explicit internal standard (Dissart, & Deller, 2000). The use of subjective indicators is the most contentious aspect of the quality of life approach. Subjective quality of life illustrates quality of life as indicated by the psychological state of life satisfaction rather than by objective conditions and settings (for example physical, social, and economic settings), although both are inter-related.

The subjective dimension is an important part of quality of life but the measures of that dimension need to be explored and evaluated alongside objective indicators in order to establish their significance. In reviewing the models and definitions within the field of quality of life, environmental quality, liveability, and sustainability, a broad variety of models and definitions have been presented. The central theme in the different approaches is the

interaction between environmental approaches and human responses. Pacione (2003) states that a crucial key theme for research into quality of life is the exploration of the relationship between people and their everyday urban environments. It is now generally acknowledged that both objective and subjective indicators are required in studying the person environment relationships (Marans 2000; 2003). Thus, research into quality of life should attempt to measure the combined effect of objective and subjective factors on human well-being.

Szalai (1980) echoes these sentiments and merges both objective and subjective indicators. To Szalai, indicators of quality of life are social indicators in so far as they characterise the well-being of certain groups of people, but, contrary to other social indicators, they are based both on objectively observable facts and on people's own subjective assessment of their life. This view is echoed by Marans and Cooper (2000), who also suggest that there is a requirement to look beyond the objective environment and further explore the perceptions people have of their environment (Turkoglu et al, 2006).

In 1999 the UK Government published a report titled 'The quality of life counts report' 1999. The quality of life indicators set out in the report are the backbone of sustainable development throughout the UK. Since its launch in 1999, QoLC has become a model and resource for a considerable number of other indicator initiatives at local, regional, national and international levels. One such set is that produced by The Audit Commission and used to assess quality of life in London. In 2002, the Audit Commission established the London Sustainable Development Commission (LSDC) to: 'help make London an exemplary sustainable world city' (Audit Commission 2005). The LQoL indicators are based around ten broad subject headings of: people and places, transport and access, economic well-being, education and life-long learning, culture and leisure, community cohesion and involvement, housing, and community safety, environment, health and social well-being.

In 2004, the Urban Audit Perception Survey – Local Perceptions of Quality of Life in 31 European Cities was launched throughout a number of selected European cities. The Urban Audit Perception Survey (2004) approaches quality of life from a purely perceptive angle. The survey took the form of telephone interviews. A total of 300 randomly selected individuals were contacted in each city. The respondents were taken from all parts of the cities. They were asked 22 questions about the quality of life in their city. The results were then weighted in order to accurately reflect the demographic make-up of each city. The survey collected the public perceptions on the following domains: employment opportunities, housing costs, safety, cleanliness of cities, public transport, air pollution, integration of immigrants, and overall satisfaction with the quality of life of their city.

2. Istanbul QoL survey

A quality of life study which was undertaken as part of the Istanbul Strategic Plan carried out by the Greater Istanbul Municipality. The purpose and aim of the research is to explore the impact of environmental, economic, social, physical and health related indicators on quality of life satisfaction in Istanbul. As research method questionnaire survey was applied to measure quality of life in Istanbul. The questionnaire framework opted for is closely related to that of the Detroit Area Study (DAS) 2001 model. The questionnaire used in Istanbul Metropolitan Area Study (IMS) was a comprehensive document containing a broad range of domain headings of residential history, housing and residential mobility, travel demand and transportation, neighborhood and neighboring, community participation, involvement and safety, employment and journey to work; shopping and entertainment; parks and recreation; health and health care facilities, schools and regional issues (Turkoglu et al, 2006).

The purpose of the research was to focus on two aspects of quality of urban life (QoUL). The first involved an objective assessment of the physical environment in residential areas (Bolen, et al. 2006). Information was collected via a physical survey of neighborhoods across Istanbul. The information was based on a number of objective measures of neighborhood attributes and was used to illustrate problems with the physical environment. The second involved the subjective assessment of the quality of community life with respect to social and economic domains and the satisfaction of the residents (Turkoglu, et al. 2006). Information was collected through a social survey. The survey focused on levels of satisfaction with aspects of urban living, residents' perceptions, and their behaviors and experiences in their living environment. A database was created for the 9 categories and combined with Arc GIS database containing all residential buildings and the number of dwelling units in each building. This combined database represented the sampling frame for the survey. From this frame, a random sample of dwelling units was selected proportional to the number of units in Istanbul. Subsequently, a sample of the 423 of the 900 buildings were

selected and within each, 6 dwelling units were randomly selected for the social survey. Of the 2538 dwelling units, 1635 face-to-face interviews were conducted representing a response rate of 66%. The range of information collected through the QOUL questionnaire including residential history, public services and transportation, taxes, schools, parks and recreation, shopping and entertainment, community participation and involvement, neighborhood and neighboring, housing and residential mobility, safety, employment and journey to work, environment, health and health care facilities, regional issues, demographics and other domain satisfactions such as standart of living and social networks. The indicators and themes used in Istanbul QoUL survey is summarized in Figure 1.

3. Conclusion

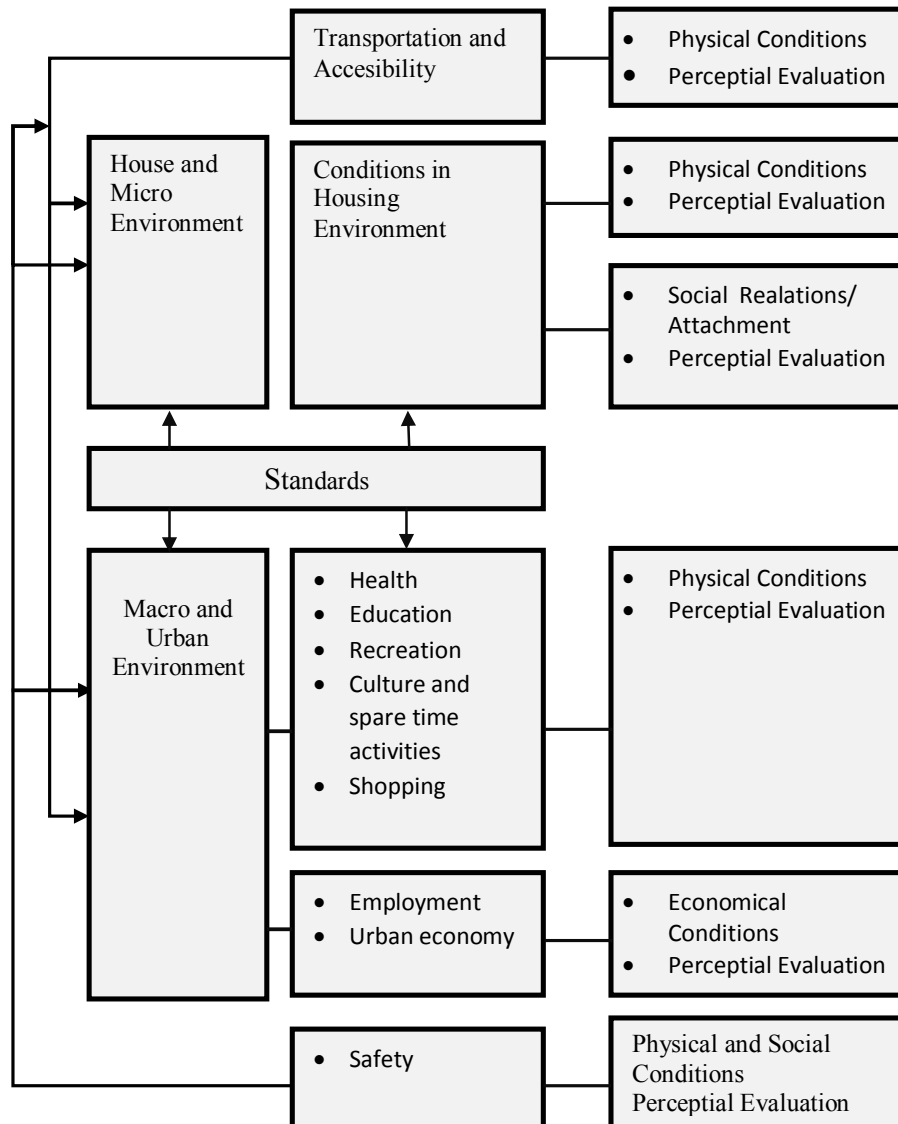


Fig. 1. The Indicators of Istanbul QoL Survey (2006).

In this paper the relationship between sustainability and quality of life researches were evaluated. The indicators was presented as an example used in quality of urban life study for the Istanbul Metropolitan Area in 2006. Istanbul study was carried out as part of a strategic planning process and intended to inform decision makers and planners about the residents' perceptions of urban life in a large and rapidly growing region. The study was designed to produce baseline data in residential conditions as perceived by the residents of Istanbul. Recently a follow-up study on quality of urban life in Istanbul Metropolitan Area is designed and an office established to monitor QoUL.

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